1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

(NET HUNTERS)

173 [p.228-A]
534 animal and since then no woman has been al-
825 lowed to see it.
562 Local villagers, who claim also to have the
171 *molimo*, are critical of the occasional joking at-
177 titude of the Mbuti and say that they, the vil-
534 lagers, call it out only when someone important has died.

POLITICAL LIFE

Authority

622 Putnam goes further than Schebesta with re-
888 gard to the existence or non-existence of chief-
tainship among the Mbuti. Primarily of the net
• [623] hunters he writes, "... there are no chiefs, councils, or any other formal governing bodies in a pygmy camp" (Putnam, 1948, 334). There is respect, he says, for age and experience (*not* for "elders"); the opinions of the old and the wise are generally heeded. Any individual who shows disrespect for an old man, or who refuses to comply with any reasonable request, is abused by the others. Old men who are eccentrics are ignored.

[NET HUNTERS]

621 888 At the same time every man in the band has a full say in any discussion. There may well not be the placid acceptance of the "elder's" decision described by Schebesta (1952, 221 ff.). For one thing, among the net hunters the old men themselves may disagree. But again, unfortunately, we do not have details as to the subjects most or least open to dispute, so can give only a general account.

• 623 554 Additional information on this point comes from the notes of Anne Putnam, in which a loose form of council of five or six of the older men is reported. Each one of these is said by Mrs. Putnam to have some specific sphere of authority such as the regulation of hunting activities, settlement of interpersonal and other disputes, but further details are not given. No evidence is offered that they act in council rather than simply in their individual capacities. In the particular band to which Mrs. Putnam refers, however, five or six of the older men included the most experienced hunters in the whole band, so that only the aged and infirm, the children, and the younger and less experienced hunters would *not* be members of the "council." According to Putnam, the Mbuti respect experience as well as age, so that an individual's experience in a particular field increases his authority in that field. Thus the "council"

[557]

[P 228-B]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[p. 228-C] [NET HUNTERS]

is almost certainly informal, because special authority within it is the result of individual qualities rather than of hereditary title to any particular office. Nowhere is there mention of any formal constitution of the council or hereditary tenure of office. Mrs. Putnam's information serves to confirm Putnam's assertion that there is no formal leadership, that any question that arises is settled by discussion, and that there is no single leader in such discussion, though respect is given to the older and more experienced men.

Nowhere is there any mention of any representative of the lineage or clan ancestors, or any indication that the lineage as such is of any importance in government. The net-hunting bands, it will be remembered, are larger than those of the archers and are more often comprised of more than one lineage.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

as a unit of Mbuti hunters sharing and recognizing a common hunting territory.[2] No matter what group the band falls under, the definition holds. The territory is clearly defined by natural boundaries, though the law of trespass depends somewhat on the location of the home band within its territory at the moment of trespass. The boundaries, though fixed, are under certain circumstances capable of penetration without causing offense.

The composition of the band is fluid, to say the least, and does not follow any clear unilineal or cognatic descent system. Throughout the forest, the bands are in a constant state of fragmentation as well as in a constant process of fission and fusion. Members of any band are quite likely at any moment to leave and join another band, temporarily or permanently, for any one of a number of reasons. In-law visiting is common, and permanent attachments to the band are sometimes accomplished this way. But at the same time, with each successive, monthly change of site, the hunting camp also shows another stage in the over-all process of fission and fusion along recognizable lines of structural cleavage. At certain times of the year, different for net-hunters and archers, the band splits up into a number of smaller sub-bands, all still hunting within the same over-all territory, but as independent units.

It has generally been stated, sometimes citing the apparent lack of an Mbuti language as an example, that the Mbuti are a people without a culture of their own, adopting the culture of their villager neighbors just as they adopt their language. A superficial look at a hunting society, with its lack of easily recognizable social institutions, might seem to confirm that opinion. There is no chieftainship, no council of elders, but sometimes an individual who assumes the villager title of *sultani* or *capita*. There is no legal system supported by effective or formal supernatural sanctions. There is an evident lack of any kinship system except an apparently slavish imitation of the villager clan and lineage system, whereby certain individuals related through the principle of patrilineal descent recognize a common ancestor and symbolize their unity by the respect of a common totem. Any attempt to integrate this system with other institutions, indigenous or adopted,

[2] Throughout, except where otherwise specified, I use the term "band" in this sense of a unit that is primarily territorial. It is essentially composed of peoples bound together by bonds other than lineage. Insofar as affines are an important part of any band, and affinal relationships as important in most respects as lineal relationships, the band cannot even be defined as cognatic or bilateral without qualification stressing its ad-hoc nature.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[P.181]

CHAPTER 11

Government: Internal

INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Before attempting to understand the over-all system of government 621
in Mbuti society, it is necessary to distinguish between different fields 121
of authority, for each field of activity has its own leaders, drawn from 571
a particular segment of the community. It is in this way that authority 554
is dispersed throughout the band; every adult is accorded special respect in one field or another, but none can claim respect in all fields. Individual authority is unthinkable, and not only are there no chiefs [622]
or headmen in Mbuti society; there are not even any councils of [623]
elders or any ritual specialists such as prophets or diviners. Such [791]
adults as have respect in any particular field at any particular moment do not even have any authority; they can merely claim to be heard. Their decision is likely to be given general assent and, as in economic matters, that decision is then said to be "good," and "pleasing" to the forest. The forest personified as a benevolent divinity remains 778
as the only recognized authority, one which sometimes expresses its 571
feelings with unmistakable clarity; an excessive storm, falling trees, 787
poor hunting and ill health may all be taken as signs of displeasure, while good weather and good health and good hunting are indications that all is well. But often the forest remains silent. Then the Mbuti have to sound its feelings out through discussion. Dreams may be taken into account, but there is no question of waiting for visible signs of the forest's pleasure. The delegation of authority is 778
clear; the decision of the whole band, the very fact of unanimity, 571
is sufficient sign of the favor of the forest. There is always diversity [829]
of opinion, freely expressed, but prolonged disagreement is consid- [192]
ered as "noise," and offensive to the forest. Unanimity, therefore, is a powerful and positive value, equated with the opposite to noise—quiet, or *ekimi*.

62 571 561 [888] **Government.**—There are no chiefs, councils, or any other formal governing bodies in a pygmy camp. In making any decisions concerning the whole camp, two factors are involved. The first of these is respect for older people.

561 571 576 888 [626] A pygmy will always, in addressing a man of an older age group in any formal situation, call him "senior"; he will listen respectfully to an older man and will always obey any reasonable orders he may give. If a younger man shows disrespect, the other members of the camp will gang up on him and berate him. This respect for age, and for the opinions of wise old men, is the basis of pygmy government.

• 623 571 561 [888] Secondly, while the opinions of most of the old men are respected, every man in the camp is entitled to state his own views on any subject. Thus, during the evening talking time, the pygmies will discuss whether to move camp, where to move it, and why; or whether to go net hunting, and where to hunt. The discussion has no leader and may go on for several evenings. Finally the men who are shouting out different opinions will come to an agreement and the decision will be acted upon.

623 571 561 888 [828] In general it is the older and more experienced men who make the decision, but as some of the old men are considered eccentrics and freaks, little attention is paid to them. Rather, it is an oligarchy of the more respected among the old men, a body with no formal membership or specific composition. In their decisions the pungent remarks of the women also have a considerable influence. [562]

594 ## Pygmy Social Organization

Families and their extensions.—The smallest normal social unit in a pygmy camp is the individual biological

[P. 334-B]